

CACTUS CORNER NEWS

Fresno Cactus & Succulent Society

<http://www.fresnocss.com>

Affiliated with the Cactus & Succulent Society of America

Vol. 42 No. 10

October 2023

IN-PERSON MEETING: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5TH, 7:00 P.M. (Doors open 6:30 p.m.)

REDEEMER LUTHERN CHURCH 1084 West Bullard, Fresno

(Near NW Corner of Palm and Bullard)

Mammillarias: The Weird and the Wonderful

Presented by: Karen Ostler



Photo Laurel Woodley

A brief look at the Genus Mammillaria, focusing on the both the beauty and the oddities of one of the cactus world's favorite plants.

I have been growing cactus since I got my first 'real' cactus; a *Gymnocalycium friedrichii*, now *G. stenopleurum*; in the spring of 1979. That same year, in the fall; I purchased 6 Mammillarias in 2 1/2" pots. I still have two of those plants; *M. albilanata* ssp. *tegelbergiana* and *M. llyodii*.

In the years since I have been involved with both the CSSA and Intercity Shows as a general helper; and have been Show Chair for the Sunset Succulent Society for at least the last 15 years.

Originally, I was living and growing both cactus and succulents in the San Fernando Valley but since moving to the high desert; I decided to concentrate on growing cactus only, focused on *Ariocarpus* and related genera, Mammillarias, North and South American *Opuntias*, and *Gymnocalyciums*.

Club Dinner: Blast and Brew, 799 West Palmdon, Fresno

Time: 4:45 p.m.

RSVP Rosanna Rojas by phone, text, or email.

(559) 999-0017

FROM THE PREZ:

Hi Members,

Annual Fall Sale

In just a few days our Annual Fall Cactus & Succulent Sale is taking place! This coming Saturday, September 30th we will be gathering at the Redeemer Church (our meeting location) to spend some money! Well, it's true. This year we have 18 Club Members bringing their home-grown plants and handmade pottery. There will be lots of unusual cacti, succulents and even houseplants to choose from, as our members always bring a variety of types. Our potters will have their stunning one-of-a-kind pottery available as well. This is a Sale not to miss!

Doors open at 10 am and we will close at 2pm. This is a **cash only event**, so don't forget to bring the green stuff. All sales go through each individual vendor, so when you find an item to purchase, pay at that table before moving to then next table. **No boxes are provided so please bring your own.**

For our vendors and anyone wishing to help. I will be there at 9am to start setting up, any help would be appreciated. Once the tables are setup and assigned, the vendors can start their setups. **Vendors, please remember to bring your own change.** The Club will not be breaking any bills. I will come around towards the end of the event to collect the \$20 table fee.

Club Donation Table

The Club will have its own table selling items that have been donated. If anyone wishes to donate, please bring your items before 10am if possible. We need time to price items before the doors open but will accept items after the start time.

This is a fun event where everyone can find something new to take home. I hope every Club member can attend and support us. If you are not a vendor and not helping with setup, please stay outside until the doors open. We must give the vendors time to setup and everyone waiting an equal chance at the Sale.

October Meeting

Just a few days after the Fall Sale is our October meeting, October 5th. This month we have a new presenter to the club, who has never been here before. Karen Ostler will be speaking on the genus Mammillaria. Mammillaria is a huge group with a large variety of shapes, textures, and colors. I'm sure all of us have or have grown Mammillarias before. They are a fun and easy cactus to have. Bring your Mammillaria to show off at the Brag Table. Don't miss this presentation!

The Fall season is here, which means it gets a little busier in the Club and in the yard. We start preparing for upcoming Club events and getting our plants ready for winter. Be on the lookout as more information comes your way. Hope to see you all at the Fall sale this coming Saturday and at the next meeting.

Thank you,

Robert

OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

Jan Armbruster (1st)
Leslie Feathers (1st)
Jazelle Rasmussen (1st)
Kristine Nolasco (2nd)
Barbara Newman (3rd)
Jaan Lepson (6th)
Marian Orvis (20th)
CoCo Magallon (20th)
Donna Schiefer (25th)

COMING EVENTS

October 4-15, Big Fresno Fair.

October 7-8, Cactus & Succulent Society of San Jose
 Fall Show and Sale, Santa Clara County Fairgrounds,
 344 Tully Rd, San Jose; hours, Sat. 10-5; Sun. 9-3:30.

October 14, Clovis Botanical Garden Fall Plant Sale,
 945 N. Clovis Ave (between Alluvial and Nees)
 Hours: 12:00 to 4 p.m.

October 14, Crop Swap, bring plant seeds or seedlings
 to trade and swap with other gardeners; Clovis
 Regional Library, 1155 5th St, Clovis;
 Hours: 10:00 to 1 p.m.

An interesting website: www.desertusa.com has
 information on U.S. deserts: travel, events, plants, and
 animals. What's blooming, etc.

Schutziana is a free digital journal devoted to the
 discussion of the genus *Gymnocalycium*. It is
 downloadable in English and other languages.
<https://www.schuetziana.org/>

The British Cactus and Succulent Society website has a
 lot of interesting plant articles:
<https://bcss.org.uk/> scroll down to "Plant of the
 Month."

Euphorbia "flowers": The things that look like
 euphorbia flowers are in fact bundles of flowers called
 cyathia. Each bisexual cyathium consists of a single
 female flower in the center, reduced to an ovary with
 styles, surrounded by male flowers each reduced to a
 single stamen on a stalk. The whole is wrapped in
 bracteoles and bracts which, when larger, give the
 appearance of flower petals. Unisex cyathia lack the
 single flowers of one particular sex.

PROPAGATING LARGE CACTUS CUTTINGS:

Frank Crosswhite of the Boyce Thompson Desert
 Arboretum recommends this technique which greatly
 reduces the problems caused by bacterial and fungal rots.

Place equal parts powdered sulfur, fungicide and
 commercial rooting powder into a large mug and add
 water to make a thin, creamy paste. Take one or two-
 foot apical cuttings of the cactus using a pruning saw.
 Make sure to cut at right angles to the plant so the
 cutting will stand on end.

With an old-fashioned shaving brush, spread the paste
 mixture onto the freshly cut end of the cutting and
 place it on its side to aid drying. This should take a few
 hours. The sulfur in the paste dries out the cut surface
 rapidly and sterilizes the wound by forming sulfuric
 acid on the moist surface. The fungicide kills many of
 the organisms which might cause necrosis. The rooting
 powder provides hormonal growth regulators, which
 induce rapid development of adventitious roots.

Store the cuttings vertically for callousing in a thin layer
 of vermiculite spread on the bottom of a plastic
 nursery container. The container should be selected so
 the cutting will fit snugly and not wobble. Such a
 container is preferable to a pot, as it has vertical sides
 that will hold the cutting in place more securely.

Store the cuttings in this position in 50-95% shade a
 month before giving the plants any water. After the
 first watering, they can be watered at weekly intervals,
 then every few days. The cuttings can be potted in a
 large container in an appropriate soil mix as soon as
 they have developed a large mass of roots.

(From an issue of *American Horticulturist* some years ago)

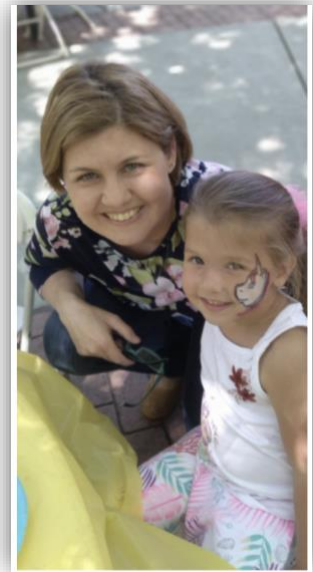
Often there is not the opportunity to get to know one another during our meetings. This column is a short introduction to some of our members.

Getting to Know You

Casey Medlock

Casey Medlock, who joined FC&SS about a year ago, was born and raised in Fresno. She is a graduate of Bullard High School.

“I attended Fresno City College for my associate degree in nursing,” she says. “I became a registered nurse and worked at St Agnes Medical Center. I completed my bachelor's degree in nursing online at Western Governors University. I have since moved to Valley Children's as a Certified Diabetes Educator. Just this past Monday, I started a new journey to pursue my master's degree in nursing, with the end goal to become a nurse practitioner in two years.”



Casey is a longtime friend of our president, Robert Scott. He encouraged her to join the club because of her passion for gardening.

“While I was at Fresno City College, I worked at Riverside Nursery. I also worked at H&E Nursery,” shares Casey. “I have always had a passion for plants and enjoy it as my hobby. So, I was able to attend last year's member sale, Christmas party, and assisted in setting up for the annual June sale. I've really enjoyed the lectures each month and have learned so much more.”

As far as her favorite plants are concerned, echeveria is at the top of the list.

“They are so easy to grow,” says Casey. “I've planted them on the north side of my house in the ground. I have started to collect cacti as well. My favorite now is any variety of ‘starfish’ flower: Stapelia, Orbea, and Huernia.

“I used to cycle and want to get back into it. I have taken up the hobby of DIY and remodeled my fireplace and laundry room over the past year and a half. I didn't realize how much I love power tools! After I finish school, I'll have more time to get back into my other hobbies of painting and drawing.”

-Carole Grosch

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ORBEA VARIEGATA



This little plant is probably the most cultivated of the stapeliads. Long known as *Stapelia variegata*, it was renamed in the 1970s, when a number of species were separated from *Stapelia* on the basis of the raised annular ring in the center of the flower. Currently 22 species are recognized.

It has a long history. In 1624, Justus Heurnius, a missionary on his way to the Dutch East Indies, was a passenger on a ship that put in at Table Bay, South Africa. While the captain bargained for goods, Heurnius went exploring, possibly up Table Mountain. There he made drawings of 10 plants, one of which was *O. variegata*. Later he sent these to his brother in Europe where they were published in 1644. Linnaeus established the genus *Stapelia* in 1737 for this species and *S. hirsuta*.

Orbea variegata is a common species along the southwest coast African coast. It grows on gentle, stony slopes, sometimes under bushes but also fully exposed on rock slabs or ledges.

The plants usually grow in clusters of cylindrical stems, forming mats that can reach several feet in diameter. The stems can reach 10 inches long, green with purple blotches, with vertical rows of toothy projections along their sides. Stems long exposed to the sun turn a shade of brown.

It flowers in late summer to fall, producing blooms at the ends of short stems at the base of the plant so that the flowers are on the ground facing upward. The individual flowers are variable, can be up to 3 inches in diameter, cream, pale yellow or greenish-yellow with maroon markings. In the center is a thickened ring called an annulus, at the center of which is the five-pointed corona, like a star within a star, where the reproductive parts of the plant are located.

The photo above, by Brian Kemble, Curator of the Ruth Bancroft Garden, shows a plant with open flowers, two unopened buds, and, in the center, a bunch of seeds with their silky tufts of hair, ready to be distributed by the wind. The seed pod is an erect cylindrical follicle which splits open to release the seeds.

The stapeliads, as a group, are often called “carrion flowers” for the rotten meat odors they emit to attract their pollinators, mainly flies. *Orbea variegata* is not quite as overpowering as some others in the genus.

As the species is native to the winter rainfall area of South Africa, it requires somewhat of a rest during our summer and careful watering and excellent drainage the rest of the year. Mealy bugs can be a problem with these plants. It’s a good idea to be proactive and spray once a month with a mix of one part each of rubbing alcohol and sudsy ammonia. Pot in layers: bottom layer—fairly rich, moisture-retaining potting soil; middle layer—mixture of half potting soil and half coarse gravel; top layer—entirely coarse gravel. They need good light but give some protection from the midday sun. Propagation is by cuttings and seeds.

References:

Kemble, Brian (2023) Plant highlights: *Orbea variegata*, accessed 23 September 2023

<https://www.ruthbancroftgarden.org/plants/orbea-variegata/>

Bruyns, P.V. *Stapeliads of Southern Africa and Madagascar*, Hatfield, S.A., Umdaus Press, 2005.



GYMNOCALYCIUM

Of all the cactus family, this is possibly the second most popular genus for specialized collectors (after *Mammillaria*) and deservedly so. The flowers are large in comparison to the plant body, sometimes up to three inches in diameter. The plants will blossom three, four or more times a year. The flowers are predominantly white or white with a pink throat, though there are a few yellows (i.e., *G. netrelianum*) and some reds (*G. baldianum*, *G. venturianum*).

Gymnos are usually small to medium-sized, but are variable. *G. saglionis* is usually a single stem up to 14 inches in diameter; on the other hand, large clusters are formed by *G. pflanzii* and *G. bruchii*, whose individual heads may only measure an inch across. The body color is ash gray to brown to blue-green, with many shadings in between. Spines vary from weak to strong, from completely appressed against the body and very pectinate to extremely erect.

The root system may be fibrous or napiform (turnip-like). This latter group needs great care in potting. A deep pot is required for the long, heavy root. That same root holds a great deal of water, though, so an extra-light soil is needed in order to prevent winter rot. In nature the portion above ground looks something like a pancake. Reacting to our tender loving care, watering, fertilizing, etc., the plants tend to become quite globular or even cylindrical.

The name *Gymnocalycium* in Greek means “naked bud.” It refers to the naked flower tube, with no bristles, hairs or spines. The name was first proposed by Pfeiffer in 1845 for three species, the first of which was *G. denudatum* (pictured), making this the “type” species, though not the most typical of the genus. Currently 56 species and 17 subspecies are recognized. Plants in the genus are sorted into five series by the shape of their seeds:

Macrosemineum – green fruits, not always splitting open. Seeds dull black, spherical, 1-3 mm in diameter; type species, *G. denudatum*;

Gymnocalycium – fruits open by a vertical split; seeds dull black, spherical, 1 mm in diameter; type species, *G. gibbosum*;

Microsemineum – fruits splitting vertically or horizontally; seeds less than 1 mm in diameter; type species, *G. saglionis*;

Trichosemineum – fruits club-shaped; splitting vertically; seeds up to 1 mm in diameter, hemispherical; type species, *G. quehlianum*;

Muscosemineum – fruit club-shaped, splitting vertically; seeds up to 1 mm in diameter, spherical; type species, *G. mihanovichii*.

One of the characteristics of gymnos is an enlargement just below the spine-areole group.

Argentina is the primary homeland of this genus, but they have a wide range in South America, from southern Argentina, through Paraguay, Uruguay, and southern Brazil to Bolivia. They are native to diverse habitats, often favoring sloping, rocky ground. Some of these areas are under stress from agriculture, grazing and urbanization.

Gymnocalyciums are frequently recommended for beginners because of their relative ease of cultivation and because they grow so well from seed. They do well in partially shaded situations and are tolerant of low winter temperatures.

Reference: Charles, Graham, *Gymnocalycium in habitat and cultivation*, Stamford, U.K., The author, 2009.



FRESNO CACTUS & SUCCULENT SOCIETY FALL PLANT SALE

Saturday, September 30th
10 am to 2pm

CASH ONLY
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